



Article by Etnia Nativa

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The Wonders of Limestone Caves

Our weekly episodes, brought to you by Etnia Nativa, serve as a platform to recognize, appreciate, and promote Aruba's cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of reconnecting with the island's unique roots and its ancestral spirit.

During this episode, we will share the rich archaeological evidence and the peculiarities of the limestone caves, while in previous episodes; we explained the limestone terraces of the island.

In prehistoric times, many limestone caves became important sites for different cultures, serving as shelters, ritual centers, and even as places where history was portrayed through rock art. Caves in Aruba, such as Canashito and Fontein, demonstrate how these locations also became canvases for early human expression. Limestone caves often have a long lifespan, remaining habitable for thousands of years, which encouraged prolonged use as shelters. The continuity of these sites allowed early humans to adapt and develop survival strategies.

The hard, durable nature of limestone provided strong and stable cave walls that protected inhabitants from the elements, such as harsh weather, rain, and wind. Caves could also shield people from predators and other dangers. They typically maintain a relatively stable temperature throughout the year. They act as natural coolers in the summer and warm shelters in the winter, offering a more comfortable environment compared to open-air living. Many of these caves are located in accessible areas like hillsides, cliffs, or river valleys, making them easy to find and reach. The entrances were often large enough to accommodate groups of people and their needs.

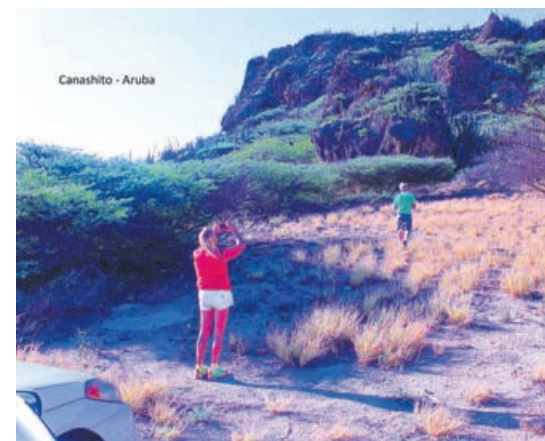
The entrance to these caves could be easily defended from intruders. This made caves a strategic choice for early human societies, as they provided a natural fortification. Also, they often have natural water sources, such as nearby streams or springs, which are essential for drinking and food preparation, while these caves might contain mineral deposits that could be useful for tool-making or other cultural survival needs.

In short, limestone caves provided practical, safe, and resource-rich environments for prehistoric people and our island has many caves that were used for shelter, rock art expression and a spiritual portal in to the underworld.

Structurally, these are unique geological formations that develop through chemical weathering, primarily due to the action of water on limestone rock. They are characterized by their impressive stalactites, stalagmites, and flowstones, formed by the deposition of minerals such as calcium carbonate over thousands or even millions of years.

The uniqueness of these remarkable areas lies in their formation and distinctive characteristics: water, often slightly acidic due to dissolved car-

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bon dioxide, seeps into the limestone and gradually dissolves it. This process creates underground voids that can eventually become large caves. The mineral-rich water inside the cave forms unique formations known as stalactites (which hang from the ceiling) and stalagmites (which rise from the floor). These formations develop slowly, often requiring thousands of years to reach large sizes.

Limestone caves harbor unique ecosystems, with species of bats, insects, and microorganisms that have adapted to their dark and often quite humid environment. Within the caves, the size often varies, with small, narrow passages and even enormous chambers. The shape and structure are influenced by factors such as water flow and the nature of the limestone itself. These caves are not only natural wonders but also important for scientific research on geology, ecology, and hydrology and have provided practical, safe, and resource-rich environments for the prehistoric inhabitants of our planet. □



If you really enjoyed reading our stories and are interested in interacting and learning more about our island's true identity, there is no better choice than Etnia Nativa—the only 'living museum of its kind in the Caribbean.' It's a fascinating opportunity, a trendsetter since 1994, and a co-founder of Islands National Park, the Archaeological Museum Aruba, and numerous Artisan Foundations, among others. Etnia Nativa shares valuable knowledge and connects you with the ancient spirit and soul of the island. We recommend booking a visit via WhatsApp +297 592 2702, as visits are private and by appointment only. You can also reach us at etnianativa03@gmail.com